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Dear MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force,

Madrone Audubon Society is a local wildlife and bird-watching organization with approximately 1700 members in Sonoma County. We put our support behind the network of marine protected areas in Package 4 for the North Central Coast Region of the Marine Life Protection Act. We ask you to select Package 4 as your preferred alternative. Package 4 gets the highest marks from scientists, provides the highest level of protection to special places along the coast, AND enjoys support from a wide range of interests.

Our members spend many THOUSANDS of hours along the coast each year to WATCH birds, whales, seals and other animals. This also translates into being a powerful economic contributor to the area. These special places off our local Sonoma Coast provide seabird nesting areas and marine mammal haulouts for birthing and important feeding areas for raising those pups and young birds to maturity. A number of areas in Package 4 are designated Important Bird Areas for migration, resting, foraging, wintering and nesting. It is also important to us that the needs of threatened and endangered species of birds, such as Marbled Murrelets, should be adequately included in the proposals and an important part of the final version.

The best scientific evidence and plans for ecosystem management should forge the final proposal. Factoring the needs of birds, marine mammals, and other wildlife in the marine protected areas planning is an important part of sound ecosystem management. This should be considered carefully before a final proposal is put forward. Since the analysis of bird and mammal needs was completed late in the process it needs to be FULLY INTEGRATED into the proposals. There are MANY different stakeholders in this equation to protect our coast and very vocal special interests should not dictate the outcome.

Our members believe that marine protected areas, especially fully protected marine reserves, are a worthwhile investment in the future health of our coastal waters. Scientific studies confirm that marine reserves harbor and support a greater diversity of life than other areas. Healthy oceans support the health of our coastal communities and our economy. We urge you to please give California the strongest possible legacy of ocean protection by recommending Package 4.

Sincerely,  
Madrone Audubon Society  
Diane Hichwa, Conservation Chair

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